

July 10, 2001

ALFRED INIGUEZ
ACTING VICE PRESIDENT, PACIFIC AREA OPERATIONS

SUBJECT: Audit Report - Assessment of Management Oversight
of Administrative Leave Used in Los Angeles and San Diego
(Report Number LC-AR-01-008)

This report presents the results of our audit of the Postal Service's oversight of other paid administrative leave used in the Los Angeles and San Diego Districts (Project Number 00JA005LC000). The objective was to determine whether management authorized other paid administrative leave in accordance with Postal Service policies and procedures.

Our audit disclosed that management oversight of other paid administrative leave needs improvement in the Los Angeles and San Diego Districts. The audit revealed that 25 of 31 employees, whose administrative leave records we reviewed, remained on other paid administrative leave beyond the time period required by bargaining agreements, and were paid over \$249,000 during this period. Also, leave slips documenting approval were either incomplete or missing for 30 of the 31 employees. As a result, management lacked the required documentation to show that the leave taken was authorized. We recommended that the acting vice president, Pacific Area Operations, clarify policies and procedures for administering and overseeing administrative leave use and ensure that leave slips are accurately completed for all leave taken.

Management concurred with our recommendations and agreed that the administration and monitoring of administrative leave can be improved in both districts. Management's planned or implemented actions are responsive to the recommendations and address the issues identified in the report. Management's comments and our evaluation of their comments are included in the report.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff during the review. If you have any questions, please contact Bennie M. Cruz, director, Labor Management, at [REDACTED], or me at (703) 248-2300. **(b) (6)**

Ronald K. Stith
Assistant Inspector General
for Oversight and Business Evaluations

Attachment

cc: Patrick R. Donahoe
Suzanne F. Medvidovich
Richard J. Strasser, Jr.
Donna M. Peak
John E. Platt
Jayne E. Schwarz
Kerry L. Wolny
John R. Gunnels

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report presents the results of our audit of Postal Service management oversight of other paid administrative leave used in the Los Angeles and San Diego District Offices. The objective of the audit was to determine whether management authorized other paid administrative leave in accordance with Postal Service policies and procedures. This report was initiated as a result of information provided by a Postal Service official who stated that a Los Angeles employee was on other paid administrative leave for over 3 years.

Results in Brief

Our audit disclosed that management oversight of other paid administrative leave needs improvement in the Los Angeles and San Diego Districts. Twenty-five of thirty-one employees remained on other paid administrative leave beyond the time period required by bargaining agreements and were paid over \$249,000 during this time. Management left employees on other paid administrative leave because (1) management believed any disciplinary actions would be appealed to the Merit Systems Protection Board, (2) responsibility for monitoring was unclear, and (3) management did not use available tools to monitor administrative leave use.

In addition, we found that leave slips documenting approval were either incomplete or missing for 30 of the 31 employees. Management did not comply with time and attendance policy and procedures. As a result, management lacked the required documentation to show whether administrative leave taken by the employees was authorized.

Summary of Recommendations

To improve oversight and reduce the use of other paid administrative leave, we recommend that the acting vice president, Pacific Area Operations, clarify policies and procedures for administering and overseeing administrative leave and ensure that leave slips are accurately completed for all leave taken.

**Summary of
Management's
Comments**

Management concurred with all recommendations. They agreed to remove employees, as appropriate, from administrative leave, develop policies for overseeing administrative leave, use available tools to monitor leave, and ensure that leave slips are properly completed.

Management also committed to ensuring there was a sound business reason for having any employee on administrative leave beyond 30 days. Management's comments in their entirety are included as an appendix to this report.

**Overall Evaluation of
Management's
Comments**

Management's planned actions are responsive to the recommendations in this report.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Employee and Labor Relations Manual and the Time and Attendance Handbook F-21 define administrative leave as absence from duty authorized by appropriate Postal Service officials without charge to annual or sick leave and without loss of pay. Granting administrative leave is permitted for reasons/events noted in the Employee and Labor Relations Manual. These reasons/events include:

- Acts of God
- Civil Disorders
- Civil Defense
- Voting and Registration
- Blood Donations
- Funeral Services
- Postmaster Conventions and Organization Business Relocation

Other paid administrative leave is a type of administrative leave authorized by management for reasons other than those mentioned above.

National Administrative Leave Use

According to Postal Service data,¹ 6,490 employees were on administrative leave in the "Other Paid Administrative Leave" category postal-wide for periods ranging from 20 to 618 days between January 1998 and July 2000 at a cost of \$44 million dollars. The table below identifies the number of employees within specific ranges of time.

| Employees on Other Paid Administrative Leave Postal-wide (January 1998 through July 2000) | | | |
|--|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| | Number of Employees | Range of Days on Leave | Amount Paid |
| | 25 | 300 – 618 | \$ 1,519,867 |
| | 231 | 125 – 299 | 6,240,703 |
| | 3,427 | 31 – 124 | 27,199,912 |
| | 2,807 | 20 – 30 | 9,801,038 |
| Total | 6,490 | | \$44,761,520 |

¹ The Office of Inspector General's (OIG's) Computer Assisted Audit Techniques group extracted data from the Postal Service payroll data files of employees who were on administrative leave for 160 hours (20 days) or more.

**Objective, Scope, and
Methodology**

Our overall objective was to determine whether management authorized other paid administrative leave in accordance with Postal Service policies and procedures. To meet our objective, we reviewed Postal Service disciplinary and time and attendance policies and procedures. We also interviewed district managers, Human Resource managers, labor relations managers and specialists, timekeepers, and supervisors.

To identify employees who were in the other paid administrative leave category between January 1998 and July 2000, the OIG's computer assisted audit techniques group extracted data from the Postal Service payroll data files. The data extracted showed that 1,704 employees in the Los Angeles and San Diego Districts were in the other paid administrative leave category between January 1998 and July 2000. Of the 1,704 employees 83 were on other paid administrative leave for more than 30 days.²

We focused our review on 31³ of the 83 employees because they were assigned to five work facilities that collectively represented more than 50 percent of the cost paid to the 83 employees. For the 31 employees, we reviewed leave slips and labor relations personnel files.

We performed our audit from August 2000 through July 2001 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and reviewed internal controls as were considered necessary to fulfill the audit objective. We discussed the conclusions and observations with management officials and included their comments, where appropriate.

Prior Audit Coverage

No prior audits conducted within the last 5 years were found addressing our audit objective.

² Collective Bargaining Agreements allow for the use of other paid administrative leave during a 30-calendar day notice period (which consists of 4 weeks). We focused on employees who received paid administrative leave for more than 6 weeks, 2 weeks longer than the 30-calendar day period required.

³ Of the 31 employees, 20 were assigned to the Los Angeles District and 11 were assigned to the San Diego District.

AUDIT RESULTS

Management Oversight Needs Improvement

Management oversight of other paid administrative leave (administrative leave) needed improvement in the Los Angeles and San Diego Districts. Management allowed employees to remain on administrative leave beyond time periods required by bargaining agreements and did not ensure that leave slips were accurately completed for all leave taken.

Postal Service Collective Bargaining Agreements with employee unions provide guidance for use of administrative leave. The agreements allow for the use of administrative leave during a 30-day notice period prior to an employee being discharged or suspended for more than 14 days.

Administrative leave, according to the Los Angeles District's Labor Relations Guide to Corrective/Administrative Action Letters, could also be used when employees are sent for fitness-for-duty examinations. These examinations are conducted to ascertain whether an employee is medically or mentally capable of meeting his/her job requirements (or are fit for duty). However, there is no criterion regarding how long an employee can be on administrative leave during the time the Postal Service is determining whether the employee is fit for duty.

Employees on Administrative Leave

Of the 31 employees whose personnel records⁴ we reviewed, 6 were nonbargaining and 25 were bargaining employees. We found no problems with the length of time the six nonbargaining employees were on administrative leave. However, we found that the 25 bargaining employees⁵ were on administrative leave beyond the time required by the collective bargaining agreements and were paid over \$249,000 during this time. We found that employees were paid beyond the time period required by bargaining agreements because (1) management believed that disciplinary actions would be appealed to the Merit Systems Protection Board, (2) responsibility for monitoring was unclear, and (3) management did not use available tools to monitor administrative leave use.

⁴ Personnel records include leave slips and labor relations files.

⁵ Of the 25 bargaining employees, 15 were assigned to the Los Angeles District and 10 were assigned to the San Diego District.

Below are three examples of the condition noted:

- A Los Angeles bargaining employee was on administrative leave for almost two years for making threatening remarks to two Postal Service supervisors on July 29, 1998. On July 31, 1998, an employee workplace intervention analyst recommended that a psychiatric fitness-for-duty examination be scheduled for the employee. However, the fitness-for-duty examination was not scheduled until almost 4 months later, in November 1998, and then again in December 1998. The employee failed to report for either examination.

The employee reported for an examination in February 1999 and was reevaluated a year later on February 4, 2000. In April 2000, he was still declared unfit for duty and was given an option letter stating that he could return to work and perform light duty assignments. In May 2000, management determined that there were no light duty assignments available. In June 2000, the employee's doctor said that he was fit for duty and, in July 2000, the Postal Service doctor concurred. The employee returned to work at the Postal Service the same month.

Postal Service policy does not provide a time frame regarding how soon a fitness-for-duty examination should be scheduled after an incident or how long it should take for an employee to complete all examinations. However, the Handbook EL-311, Personnel Operations, Section 343, states that failure to report for a fitness-for-duty examination without acceptable reasons is just cause for disciplinary action; and repeated refusal is grounds for separation from the Postal Service.

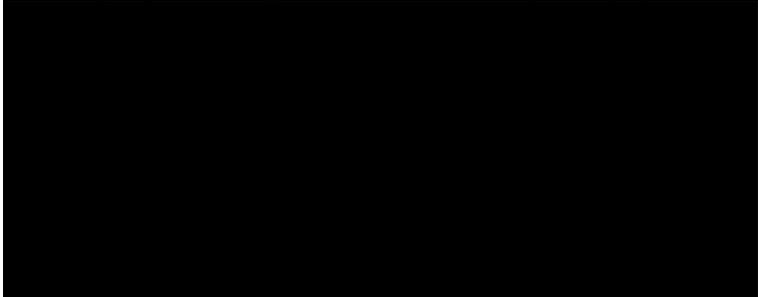
We discussed our observations with Los Angeles District officials, and they stated that: employees sent for fitness-for-duty examinations could be on administrative leave until a determination is made whether the employee is fit for duty. Determining if an employee is fit for duty can take a while – especially if the employee is obtaining several medical opinions. However, allowing employees to remain on administrative leave

for 2 years can be a problem because it is important for the Postal Service to have its employees at work. The process to deal with this employee took much longer than necessary. Employees should not be on administrative leave for extended periods of time.

- A Los Angeles bargaining employee was on administrative leave for 82 days, beginning February 1999. Not only was he on administrative leave beyond the 30-day notice period, he was also on leave beyond his effective date of removal. According to the Employee and Labor Relations Manual, the effective date of separation/removal is the last day the employee is carried on the rolls. A labor relations manager informed us that an employee is not allowed to remain on administrative leave after his/her effective date of removal.

This employee was charged with failure to protect and secure Postal Service mail and causing loss of registered mail in 1999. On March 5, 1999, a notice of proposed removal was issued. This letter stated that the employee would be removed from employment 30 days after he received the letter, which occurred on March 10, 1999. However, on May 7, 1999, another letter was issued advising the employee that his effective date of removal was to be May 12, 1999. Postal Service records, however, showed that the employee remained on administrative leave until June 1999.

On June 14, 1999, the employee appealed his suspension to the Merit Systems Protection Board. During the appeals process, from June to September, the employee was placed in a nonduty/nonpay status.



(b) (2)

At the very least, Postal Service management should have removed the employee on May 12, 1999, his effective date of removal. If this had been done, the employee would probably have appealed to the Merit Protection Systems Board sooner and the case may not have gone until September 1999. We discussed our observations with the labor relations manager, Los Angeles District, and he stated that this was a management oversight and the employee was on administrative leave longer than he should have been.

- A San Diego bargaining employee was on administrative leave for 71 days. Not only was he on administrative leave beyond the 30-day notice period, he was also on leave beyond his effective date of removal. The employee was charged with unacceptable conduct for removing property from the residence of a Postal Service customer in September 1999. On October 20, 1999, a notice of proposed removal was issued. This letter stated that the removal of the employee was to be implemented 30 days after the receipt of the letter. Based on the employee's records, we could not determine when the employee actually received the October 20, 1999, letter.

Subsequently, on November 16, 1999, a letter was issued advising the employee that his effective date of removal was to be December 20, 1999. Postal Service records, however, showed that the employee remained on administrative leave until January 2000. The employee, stating that he was a veteran, appealed his suspension to the Merit Systems Protection Board on January 18, 2000. During the appeals process, the employee was placed in a nonduty/nonpay status. On April 7, 2000, the Merit Protection Systems Board dismissed the case because the employee was not a veteran. Additionally, the employee filed a grievance against the Postal Service, and on April 11, 2000, the Postal Service and the National Association of Letter Carriers reached a pre-arbitration settlement agreement decision. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(b) (2)

At the very least, management should have removed the employee on December 20, 1999, his effective date of removal. We discussed our observations with the postmaster, Palm Springs, and he stated that he was unsure why this employee remained on administrative leave beyond the 30-day notice period and his effective date of removal.

Merit Systems
Protection Board
Avoidance

According to labor relations specialists in the Los Angeles District, management allowed preference eligible bargaining employees (veterans) to remain on administrative leave beyond the 30-day notice period because the Postal Service did not want veteran employees to appeal suspensions or discharges to the Merit Systems Protection Board. According to the collective bargaining agreements, a veteran, who chooses to appeal a suspension or discharge to the Merit Systems Protection Board, rather than through the Postal Service's grievance-arbitration procedure, shall remain on the rolls in a nonpay status (such as leave without pay) until disposition of the case either by settlement or through exhaustion of his/her Merit Systems Protection Board rights.

[REDACTED]

(b) (2) Of the 25 bargaining employees reviewed, 18 were veterans.

Responsibility for
Monitoring Unclear

Postal Service employees seemed to be unsure who was responsible for overseeing administrative leave use and monitoring the amount of time employees were on administrative leave. Although we did not find criteria or guidance stating which office is responsible for overseeing and monitoring administrative leave use, time and attendance policies clearly state that supervisors are responsible for approving all leave taken, which must be

documented on a leave slip. We discussed our observations with Postal Service employees and their comments are as follows:

- According to customer service/plant supervisors and timekeepers, extended administrative leave is mainly the result of disciplinary problems and is usually handled in conjunction with supervisors and labor relations employees. The labor relations office sometimes issues memoranda, telling supervisors to place employees on administrative leave until further notice. Labor relations employees have specified the length of time to continue employees on administrative leave and authorized timekeepers to continue administrative leave beyond the 30-day notice period.
- According to labor relations employees, the labor relations office is primarily a support system for Postal Service management and may only recommend that an employee be placed on administrative leave.

Various officials were under the assumption that it was not their responsibility to administer and monitor administrative leave use. This created confusion and as a result, management was not effectively monitoring administrative leave use and employees remained out for extended periods of time. As mentioned above, time and attendance policies clearly state that supervisors are responsible for approving and authorizing all leave taken, and not labor relations employees.

Tools to Monitor
Administrative Leave
Not Used

Management did not always use available tools to monitor administrative leave use. Leave slips were not reviewed and approved for all leave taken. According to the Employee and Labor Relations Manual, all absences (authorized and unauthorized) must be recorded on the PS Form 3971, Request for, or Notification of Absence (or leave slip). According to the Time and Attendance Handbook F-21, the reason for using the administrative leave category "Other Paid Leave" should be thoroughly explained in the remarks block of the leave slip. According to Postal Service employees, some employees on administrative leave simply got "lost in the shuffle" and management forgot about them. If management reviewed and approved leave slips as required, employees on leave

would be less likely forgotten—signing a leave slip would serve as a reminder that the employee was on leave.

In addition, some supervisors informed us that, although reports were available, the reports were not always used to monitor administrative leave use. For example, the Sick Leave, Leave Without Pay, and Other Leave Usage Report captures all leave used by employees. This report is printed every pay period and lists all employees by pay location, who used sick leave, leave without pay, or other leave during the reporting pay period. This report provides a total for each leave type for each pay location. According to some supervisors, this report was used to monitor sick leave and leave without pay, but not administrative leave.

Employees Paid, But
Not Working

As a result of a lack of effective management oversight, 25 bargaining employees were on administrative leave beyond the time required and were paid over \$249,000 for the time beyond the 30-day period. Furthermore, while on administrative leave, these employees continued to accrue annual and sick leave, and receive health benefits – at a cost to the Postal Service, which should not have been incurred. These employees should have been terminated or should have been in a nonpay status.

A sizable workforce is required to process the mail. Having the necessary employees available for work when scheduled—three tours or shifts, operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week—is important to meet processing deadlines and, in turn, customer’s expectations. Employees’ absences, particularly for long, extended periods of time—could potentially affect delivery operations.

Recommendation

We recommend the acting vice president, Pacific Area Operations, immediately review all districts’ administrative leave use, and direct Los Angeles and San Diego District managers to:

1. Remove, as appropriate, bargaining-unit employees from administrative leave who are beyond the required 30-calendar day notice period.

**Management's
Comments**

Management concurred with the intent of this recommendation and stated that they would remove employees from administrative leave, as appropriate. Management noted that a review was conducted of all employees on administrative leave in the San Diego and Los Angeles Districts. The review disclosed the use of administrative leave was appropriate and that only one employee's administrative leave would exceed the 30-day requirement. Management interpreted policy as allowing employees to be on administrative leave beyond the 30-day notice period; however, stated they would ensure a sound business reason for placing an employee on administrative leave beyond the 30-day period. [REDACTED]

(b) (2)

**Evaluation of
Management's
Comments**

We believe that management's planned or implemented actions are responsive to the recommendation and address the issues identified in the report. Specifically, management's commitment to ensure that there is a sound business reason and justification for leaving employees on leave beyond the 30-day period is responsive to the recommendation if fully put into practice.

(b) (2)

Recommendation

We recommend the acting vice president, Pacific Area Operations, immediately review all districts' administrative leave use, and direct Los Angeles and San Diego District managers to:

2. Clarify and disseminate policies and procedures for administering and overseeing administrative leave use to include a review process that (a) ensures minimal use of administrative leave, and (b) identifies who is responsible for monitoring administrative leave.

| | |
|--|---|
| Management's Comments | Management concurred with this recommendation and stated they are developing and implementing policies, effective April 2001. |
| Evaluation of Management's Comments | Management's comments are responsive to our finding and recommendation. |
| Recommendation | <p>We recommend the acting vice president, Pacific Area Operations, immediately review all districts' administrative leave use, and direct Los Angeles and San Diego District managers to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Require all managers and supervisors to use available tools, such as the Sick Leave, Leave Without Pay, and Other Leave Usage Report, to record and monitor administrative leave usage. |
| Management's Comments | Management concurred with our recommendation and informed us that the Human Resources and Finance Offices would create an administrative leave usage report available April 2001. Managers and supervisors will use this report to monitor administrative leave usage. |
| Evaluation of Management's Comments | Management's comments are responsive to our finding and recommendation. |

**Leave Slips Were
Incomplete or
Missing**

Managers and supervisors did not complete leave slips for all administrative leave taken. Specifically, we found that leave slips documenting approval for administrative leave were either missing or incomplete for 30 of the 31 employees we reviewed. This occurred because management did not comply with time and attendance policies.

Further, we found that most of the leave slips on file were incomplete because they lacked the required information:

- The signatures of the supervisor, employee, and the person recording the absence were missing.
- The number of hours and dates requested were not annotated.
- The reason the employee was on administrative leave was not recorded in the remarks block.

As a result, the Postal Service lacked the written proof that the leave taken was authorized.

**Compliance with Time
and Attendance
Policies**

We discussed our observations with Postal Service officials and found that although they understood the requirement to complete leave slips, they simply did not comply with time and attendance policies. For example, a postmaster, San Diego District commented that when employees are placed on administrative leave, there is not much formality and everything is not written down because issues are communicated verbally. The postmaster also stated that supervisors “sometimes” complete leave slips. Further, a station manager and supervisor stated that usually, leave slips are not completed for administrative leave.

**Management Lacked
Proof That Leave
Taken was Authorized**

As a result of incomplete and missing leave slips, management had no proof that the leave taken was authorized. Further, without accurate and complete leave slips, the Postal Service lacks the support needed to defend its position and decision to place the employee on administrative leave, if ever challenged.

| | |
|--|---|
| Recommendation | We recommend the acting vice president, Pacific Area Operations, direct Los Angeles and San Diego District managers to: 4. Ensure that employees and supervisors complete all leave slips correctly, without errors or omissions; and forward all completed leave slips to timekeepers in accordance with established policies and procedures. |
| Management's Comments | Management agreed with our recommendation and informed us that instructions will be sent to all timekeepers advising them that administrative leave cannot be processed without a properly completed leave slip. These instructions will be distributed to timekeepers in April 2001. |
| Evaluation of Management's Comments | Management's comments are responsive to our finding and recommendation. |

APPENDIX. MANAGEMENT'S COMMENTS

HUMAN RESOURCES
PACIFIC AREA OFFICE



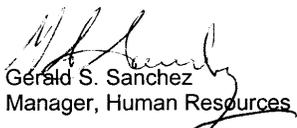
May 21, 2001

Ronald J. Stith
Assistant Inspector General
Oversight and Business Evaluations
1735 N. Lynn Street
Arlington, VA 22209-2020

Re: Response to Audit Report – Assessment of Management Oversight of Administrative
Leave Used in Los Angeles and San Diego PCs – Addendum
(Report No. LC-AR-01-DRAFT)

This is an addendum to our original response dated March 29, 2001, in reference to
Recommendation 1:

We concur and agree with the intent of the recommendation and will make every effort, on a case-by-case basis, to ensure that there is a sound business reason for any employee on administrative leave longer than the 30-day period. Further, San Diego and Los Angeles have reviewed all employees currently on administrative leave and have ensured me that the use of administrative leave for these employees is appropriate. Currently, there is only one employee in San Diego who will exceed the 30 days by two weeks and the facts and circumstances of this person's case supports management's decision to have the employee on administrative leave longer than 30 days.


Gerald S. Sanchez
Manager, Human Resources

cc: District Manager – San Diego
– Los Angeles

HUMAN RESOURCES
PACIFIC AREA OFFICE



March 29, 2001

Via Fax and First-Class Mail

Ronald J. Stith
Assistant Inspector General
Oversight and Business Evaluations
1735 N. Lynn Street
Arlington, VA 2209-2020

Re: Response to Audit Report – Assessment of Management Oversight of
Administrative Leave Used in Los Angeles and San Diego PCs
(Report No. LC-AR-01-DRAFT)

This is in response to the March 2, 2001 transmittal of the above-cited reports.

In reference to the recommendations made, overall, we agree that the administration and monitoring of administrative leave can be improved on in both districts.

In reference to specific recommendations for Los Angeles and San Diego Districts, we agree as follows:

1. Remove, as appropriate, bargaining-unit employees from administrative leave who are beyond the required 30-calendar day notice period.
 - Los Angeles will review with all employees and complete by March 30, 2001. San Diego completed its review on March 26, 2001.
2. Clarify and disseminate policies and procedures for administering and overseeing administrative leave use to include a review process that (a) ensures minimal use of administrative leave and (b) identifies who is responsible for monitoring administrative leave.

Los Angeles will develop and place in effect by April 9, 2001. San Diego will develop and have in place by April 6, 2001.

3. Require all managers and supervisors to use available tools, such as the Sick Leave, Leave Without Pay and other Leave Usage Report to record and monitor administrative leave usage.

Human Resources and Finance will create a pay period report on administrative leave usage. Los Angeles will complete this by April 9, and San Diego will complete it by April 6. Both districts will monitor the report with managers and supervisors.

4. Ensure that employees and supervisors complete all leave slips correctly, without errors or omissions; and forward all completed leave slips to timekeepers in accordance with established policies and procedures.

1

Instructions will be sent to all timekeeping employees instructing them that no administrative leave can be processed without a properly completed PS Form 3971. Los Angeles will complete and send out instructions by April 9, and San Diego will implement instructions by April 8, 2001.

AREAS OF DISAGREEMENT:

Management Oversight Needs Improvement (Page 3).

The statement that "employees remained on paid administrative leave beyond the time period required by bargaining agreements" (Page 3) needs clarification. The parties (union and management) have interpreted this section to mean "no less than 30 days." In most, if not all removal actions, the timeframe for investigation and preparation of the removal notice can reasonably be expected to take up to 15 days. Accordingly, when placing an employee into an administrative leave status, pending investigation and noting that once the removal notice is issued, there is a 30-day notice period. It is reasonable to expect that a 45-day leave time is more reasonably a minimum timeframe, not a maximum, as implied by the report.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(b) (2)

[REDACTED]

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your findings and recommendations.


Gerald R. Sanchez
Manager, Human Resources

cc: Suzanne Medvidovich
Donna Peak
Al Iniguez
John Platt
Kerry Wolny